

It is brilliant to see the significant efforts East Devon District Council in planning to reach net-zero carbon emissions. It is essential for individuals and local organizations to be on board if we are to have any chance of saving the planet. However there seems to be danger of a massive point being missed here.

Firstly, we are at the base of a huge pyramid. EDDC is one of 10 district councils and unitary authorities in Devon; Devon is one of 48 counties in England; England is one of 4 nations in the UK; and the UK is one of 193 members of the United Nations out of 196 countries of the world (i.e. the top of the pyramid). And the United Nations is very clear that to avoid the more serious consequences of man-made climate change we have to bring atmospheric carbon (or CO₂) down to a level where nature can take back control and avoid exceeding a 1.5°C average global temperature rise above the preindustrial level. And, due to our tardiness, the remaining carbon budget available to us means we now have only 8 years left to reach that level of CO₂. That stark reality is enough to answer probably most of the questions in the consultation questionnaires. So, globally, we must reduce all our greenhouse emissions by as much as we can and as quickly as we can; accordingly, we must leave all remaining fossil fuels in the ground; tree planting and reforestation will need to be supplemented by artificial draw-down of atmospheric carbon; and, to ensure a high degree of achievement, our target for net-zero carbon has to be no later than 2030 – we have no time to waste.

Secondly this is not a local issue, it is a truly global issue, and we are very aware that Local Plan development is a vehicle more for rhetoric than for action. But this issue is so serious that it needs a “Carbon Plan” in its own right (as DCC) and one that links all the way down from the top to the bottom of the whole pyramid. Both the COVID-19 and the climate emergencies will require huge changes to lifestyle and economic management so the next UN Climate Conference in Glasgow makes this year a golden opportunity to get the action really moving. All countries genuinely and cohesively have to commit to their carbon plans of ‘action’ without waiting for them to be included in Local Plans.

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